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FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3073

INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE

RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3445

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000359

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, DS/DSS/OSAC, S/CT, D, P, M, INR, CA, AF/S;
GABORONE FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM ASEC CASC LT

SUBJECT: LESOTHO JUNE 20 SITREP: CONTINUED QUIET IN MASERU

REF: A) MASERU 358 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 355 AND PREVIOUS

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: A second consecutive night of calm on June 19-20 during newly shortened curfew hours has eased Maseru's immediate tensions. On June 20, Lesotho's powerful taxi associations agreed with a GOL appeal to postpone consideration of a strike until June 25, the GOL's Ombudsman publicly spoke out against the curfew, and Prime Minister Mosisili, making his first public comments on the situation in Lesotho during a state visit to South Africa, conceded a possible link between recent violence and an unresolved post-election political impasse. The Government of Lesotho continues to operate normally and the local population remains calm (though apprehensive), dissipating any immediate likelihood of unrest or instability. On the basis of the shortened curfew, Embassy Maseru resumed normal operating hours on June 20, though it will continue to defer non-essential USG travel to Lesotho. END SUMMARY.

Another Quiet Night

¶12. (SBU) After a second consecutive night of calm on June 19-20 and the shortening of Lesotho's daily curfew from twelve to nine hours (now lasting from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.), tensions subsided in the capital city of Maseru. In an apparent attempt to thwart a legal challenge to the curfew, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service's (LPMS) curfew revision referenced a 1984 statute rather than controversial 1991 provisions established by the then ruling military government. A local pro-opposition radio station reported additional allegations of abuses by military and police officers, including an alleged rape, but security officials told senior diplomats that the curfew has led to a sharp decline in overall local crime. On the basis of reduced curfew hours, Embassy Maseru resumed normal operating hours on June 20. The U.S. Mission continues to defer non-essential USG travel to Lesotho due to limitations that the curfew imposes on local transportation and services.

¶13. (U) Prime Minister Phakalitha Mosisili remained in South Africa on a state visit, and has not addressed the Basotho public on the curfew or associated violence that has occurred since June 10. According to press reports, however, Mosisili referred to the curfew in a press conference in Cape Town with SA President Mbeki, conceding that recent attacks on the homes of three cabinet ministers could be linked to post-election political tensions in Lesotho. "There was unhappiness about the way proportional representation seats were allocated," said Mosisili.

Taxi Drivers Delay Strike Decision,
Factory Workers Union Threatens

¶4. (U) On June 20, Lesotho's powerful taxi associations met with Acting Minister of Public Works and Transportation Lesole Mokoma to discuss the present curfew in light of their threat to the halt taxi services if the GOL did not lift the curfew by 12:00 p.m. on June 20 (ref A). According to Embassy sources, Acting Minister Mokoma requested that the taxi associations delay any decision about a strike until Monday June 25 to allow him time to consult other GOL officials. The taxi associations agreed to delay action, an indication of at least a partial placation by the recent loosening of the curfew. The vast majority of public and private sector employees in Maseru commute by private taxi.

¶5. (U) At the same press conference, the Factory Workers Union (FAWU) threatened to strike and peacefully demonstrate if the GOL does not fully lift the curfew by Sunday, June 24. Many of Lesotho's 40,000 garment workers work swing shifts and are not compensated for lost work due to the curfew.

GOL Ombudsman Speaks Out on Curfew

¶6. (U) The Government of Lesotho's Ombudsman, an independent dispute resolution officer with binding authority over the executive branch, publicly expressed concern on June 20 regarding the ongoing curfew, which he said had curtailed citizens' constitutional rights. In a written press statement, the Ombudsman said that the curfew negatively affected Lesotho's already weak economy as it forced workers to curtail working hours. The Ombudsman appealed to law enforcement authorities to speed up the process of identifying and disarming unlawful elements in Lesotho so that the curfew could be lifted. "[The successful completion of law enforcement investigations] can return life in the Maseru district to normal and the residents

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can again start enjoying their fundamental rights in a free democratic society, which have been taken away by the curfew," he stated. The office also appealed to members of the public to support law enforcement authorities in their efforts to investigate recent attacks.

COMMENT: Immediate Sense of Danger
Dissipates, Unpredictability Remains

¶7. (U) The Government of Lesotho continues to operate normally and the local population remains calm (though apprehensive), dissipating any immediate likelihood of unrest or instability. On June 20, GOL principal secretaries (senior civil servants of each respective cabinet ministry) held a mid-day intramural soccer match, reflecting a continued sense of business as usual during daylight hours. While the attacks and violence of June 10-17 pose a significant problem for security and military authorities, there is no indication that the unidentified perpetrators seriously threaten the GOL's short-term ability to govern and operate.

¶8. (SBU) The situation, however, does remain unpredictable. The Deputy Prime Minister's view that current or former military personnel are attempting to acquire weapons in order to achieve eventual political objectives (ref B) may be hyperbole, but the military-style attacks certainly suggest that criminal gains are not the motive. The curfew appears to be a knee-jerk reaction to the confusion and embarrassment brought on by assailants capable of disarming well trained LDF soldiers and LMPS police officers with nary a shot fired. While security officials may take comfort in the reduced crime produced by the curfew, local patience for the curfew's inconveniences and uncertainties will not endure indefinitely. END COMMENT.

MURPHY